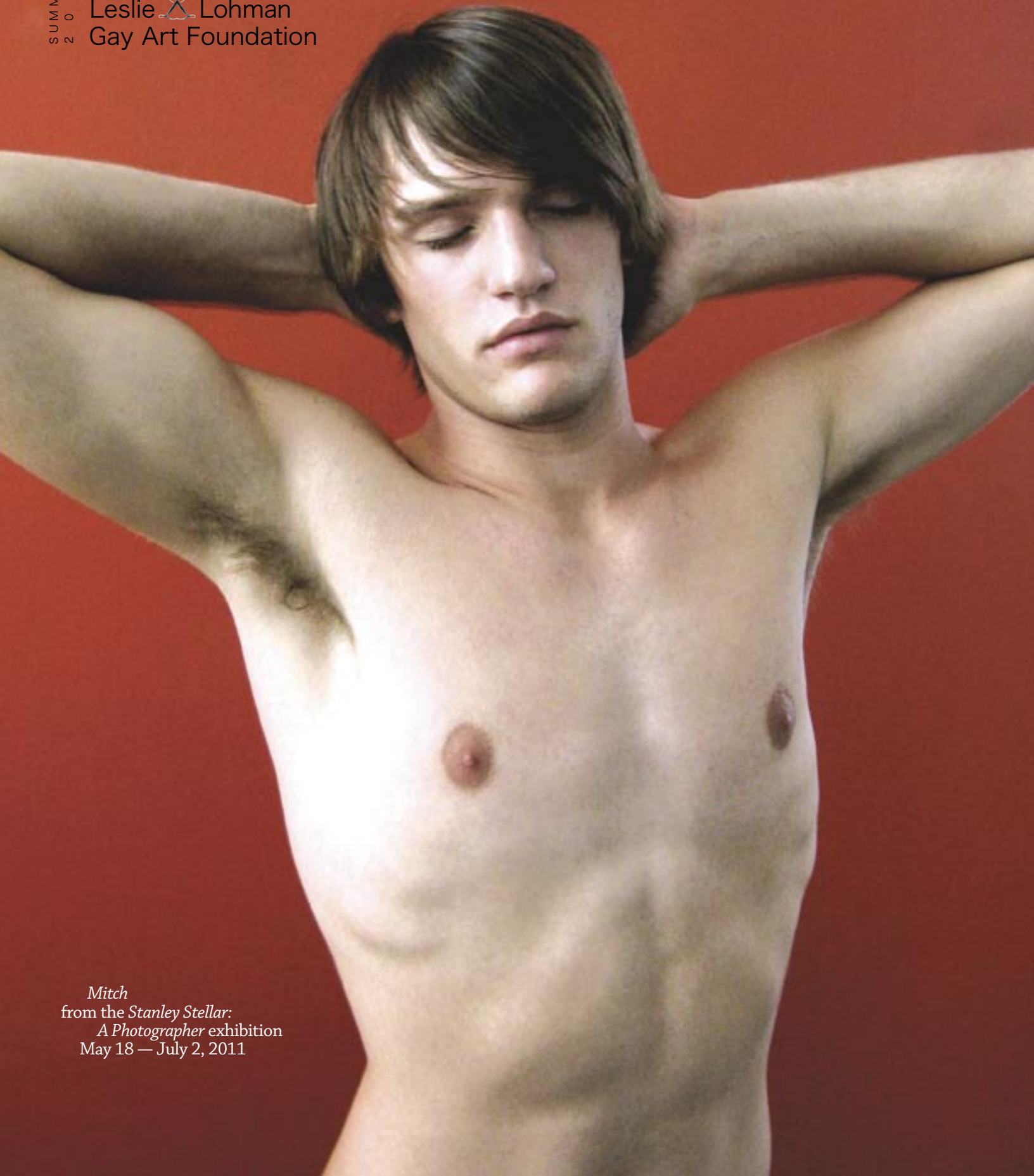


THE ARCHIVE 39

SUMMER
2011

The Journal of the
Leslie  Lohman
Gay Art Foundation



Mitch
from the *Stanley Stellar:*
A Photographer exhibition
May 18 — July 2, 2011



(above) Stanley Stellar, *Bare Bro in Brooklyn*, 1990, silver gelatin print 20 x 18.5"

(right) Craig Seymour, *Secrets*, Washington D.C., 2010, digital file



Leslie Lohman Gay Art Foundation

is a non-profit foundation established in 1990 to provide an outlet for art work that is unambiguously gay and that is frequently denied access to mainstream venues. The Foundation's gallery mounts exhibitions of work in all media by gay and lesbian artists with an emphasis on subject matter that speaks directly to the gay and lesbian experience, including erotic, political, romantic and social imagery. The Foundation provides special support for emerging and under-represented artists. Its programs include regularly scheduled exhibitions, artists' and curators' talks, panel discussions, a quarterly journal, an archive of artists' data, and a permanent collection of art.

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The Archive

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Tues. – Sat. 12 – 6pm
Closed Sun. & Mon., all major holidays and between exhibitions



FRONT COVER
Stanley Stellar, *Mitch*, Archival Digital Color Print, 39.9 x 30", 2008.

CORRECTIONS

The location shots from the filming of Gio Black Peter's *Revolving Door (New Fuck New York)* video included in the last issue were taken by Slavas Mogutins.

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John Burton Harter, *Male Nude*, ca. 1970s, oil on panel, 13.1 x 7.4"

This issue of *The Archive* is made possible entirely by a generous donation from the **John Burton Harter Charitable Trust.**

Fernando Carpaneda is a Queer Punk and He is Free

BY THOMAS BISTRITZ



Fernando Carpaneda, *Punk Crust*, clay sculpture, 8 x 3.37 x 3.37", 2011

Underground Artist and

LGBTQ activist Fernando Carpaneda continues to push limits. Born in Brasília, Brazil, the New York City-based Carpaneda is a founding member of the Anté Art, a new movement coined by Billy Name, who was Andy Warhol's primary documentarian. For Name, the Anté Art movement congregates artists who ask in the 21st century the following question that Dadaists asked almost a hundred years ago: "where next?"¹ In pursuit of new forms of artistic expression, Anté artists do not distinguish their life from their artwork. A body of work fleshes its artist, much like Carpaneda's provocative clay sculptures literally and figuratively take on their creator's life. His subjects are people typically considered social outcasts — rent boys, junkies, punks and the like — who follow their own path much like artists do, not the one that society proscribes for them. He emblemizes them by incorporating objects that relate to their lived experience and by dressing them, when he does, with material from his clothes and with human hair, including his own. He uses these 17th century artisan techniques to humanize the sculptures, to engage his audience about the distance they may want to maintain from subjects like these. Carpaneda wants us to consider how we position ourselves against or with these social outsiders, even if we may claim membership in another socially marginalized group in which we might find solace.

Carpaneda's work has been recognized internationally, with shows across the United States as well as in Brazil, the United Kingdom and Italy. He is included in the permanent collections of the Leslie/Lohman Gay Art Foundation (LLGAF), the Museum of Sex and the Erotic Heritage Museum. In 2008, he was a featured artist in the Bridge Art Fair of Art Basel Miami Beach, one of the most important art shows in the United States. He is also the author of *O Anjo de Butes*, an autobiography chronicling his life and artistic process.

A month before his newest exhibition, *Queer Punk*, will open at the LLGAF, I had the opportunity to ask him a few questions regarding his work and his upcoming show.

Q: How would you describe the Anté Art movement?

A: Anté Art is a movement free from conceptions and preconceptions. Anté Art is being yourself and not bothering with the opinions of others about what you do or do not do.

You're represented internationally by the Kymara Gallery. How long have you been associated with them? How did your association begin?

I've been associated with the Kymara Gallery for about two years. My first contact with the Kymara Gallery happened when I participated in the exhibition *SUPERNOVAS* with the Andy Warhol Superstars. My old friend Billy

"Carpaneda wants us to consider how we position ourselves against or with these social outsiders, even if we may claim membership in another socially marginalized group in which we might find solace."

Name (one of the Andy Warhol Superstars) invited me to participate in the exhibition and that's how I met Kymara Lohnergan. Since then, we've begun to work together.

In your artist statement, you say that the theme present in your work is the human being and the human experience and that you draw heavily on the subcultures of our society, including hustlers, rent boys and junkies. What is your interest in this subculture? Have you always been intrigued by the lives of what society considers "outcasts"? Does this come from your own personal experiences?

Well, I've always liked these so-called "outcasts." I think they are people who have the courage to become exactly who they want to be and to confront society head-on. They do what they like and don't give a damn about the opinions of others. I've always liked strong people. Their determination to live how they want inspires me. Thus, most of those portrayed by me are rent boys, porn actors, punks and beggars.

Fernando Carpaneda, *Pastor Phelps Masturbation*, Clay sculpture, 7 inches tall, 2011



Your pieces are so intricately put together. How long does the average piece take you to complete? Do your subjects pose for you, or are they created purely out of your mind?

It usually takes me 30 days to finish a sculpture. I use three processes in the creation of the sculptures (live model, photography and drawing), depending, of course, on the availability of the model or person whom I'm portraying. Since I meet most people on the streets, sometimes it's difficult to find them again. I always go out with a sketchbook and a camera, just in case.

I read that you depend on your past experiences to help shape your art. When creating, do you feel like an observer or a participant?

I feel like both an observer and a participant. I transform my sculptures into a sort of reliquary, where you can identify many references concerning the models: sentences, poems, human hair, etc. I do this because I want to create a work that has a very strong meaning for me. I don't want it to just be a sculpture. I wanted it to have a link between the models I use and me. That's one of the reasons why



(far left) Fernando Carpaneda, *O Anjo de Butes*, Clay sculpture, 12 inches tall, 2010

(left) Fernando Carpaneda, *Queer Punk*, Clay sculpture, 12 inches tall, 2011

my past experiences are always present in the works.

What does the title of your newest exhibition, *Queer Punk*, mean to you? Do you consider yourself as a queer punk?

Yes, I'm a *queer punk*. I hope that *Queer Punk* can reach an audience that appreciates art, regardless of whether they are gay or straight. My goal with this exhibition

How many sculptures will be on display at the exhibition?

I will be showing 53 sculptures.

Do you have a piece in this current collection, one that you're most attached to?

My favorite sculpture is the *Bolsonaro's Sex Party*, which is an affront to Brazilian racist politician Jair Bolsonaro, who makes explicit declarations against black

What do you hope the audience can take away after viewing this exhibition?

I make my work for myself. I'm not interested in other people's opinion, whether it's negative or positive. For me, it doesn't matter who likes it or not. I'm happy sculpting my diary and living in my own little world.

Is there any advice that you would give to people searching for their own art and creative process?

Be yourself. Don't sell yourself and don't allow anyone to interfere in your work. I think this is a principle that every true artist must have.

Describe yourself using five adjectives.

Beery, Queer, Punk, Drunk, Junkie.

Queer Punk opens June 25th in the LL-GAF Basement Annex and runs daily from 1:00 — 6:00 p.m. through July 2nd.

¹ Hans Richter, *dada: art and anti-art* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 1997), 9.

“Even though I was stabbed on my back by a skinhead for exhibiting **anti-Nazi works** and I am still persecuted by them to this day, I am committed to making this kind of art.”

tion is also to show other sides within the LGBTQ culture and within society in general. I want to open the minds of the audience to other possibilities within gay and underground art. *Queer Punk* is an exhibition that speaks of freedom, of being who you are, without fear of expressing your ideas and ideals.

and gay people on Brazilian television. Racist politicians such as Bolsonaro should be in jail instead of sitting on a chair at the Senate of the Brazilian Congress. Even though I was stabbed on my back by a skinhead for exhibiting anti-Nazi works and I am still persecuted by them to this day, I am committed to making this kind of art. While I'm alive, I will fight against homophobes and against any kind of racism.



Fernando Carpaneda, *Scruffy Guys*, Clay sculpture, 4 inches tall, 2010

Connecting Stanley Stellar with *The Beauty of All Men*

BY SETH CLARK SILBERMAN

“My life has been thousands and thousands and thousands of images,” Stanley Stellar tells me as we sit across the corner of his desk.¹ On the page, these words read like the retrospective assessment of a finished career; but as he says them to me in person, they present a vibrant visual life with equal parts wonder and yearning. He is still the same young boy who first discovered that changing the angles of his grandmother’s three-way mirror could transform what he saw and then poured through her magazines of the late ‘40s and early ‘50s to start building his photographic vocabulary.² That young boy later worked as an editorial art director in the ‘70s before buying his first “real camera,” a 35 mm, in 1976 — he had had an Instamatic — and taking all those pictures.

“I was born in 1945,” Stellar explains, pausing for emphasis. “I’m 66. Years old. So, I have been visually aware for the second half of the twentieth century. I’m well trained in the editorial images, the magazine images, the magazine photographers, editorial photographers, fine art photographers, fine artists, the whole ‘60s Warhol pop thing, advertising images, television images, movie images, t-shirt images — *did I leave anything out?* — newspapers, the media, fanzines. All these levels. I was making color Xeroxes when the first three machines existed in New York. I’m well versed, visually, on what has been done, and what is fresh versus what is a cliché.” The more he talks, his encyclopedic visual literacy belies a palpable youthfulness that could not know as much or would not reside in the body before me. “It’s all in me. So, as a result, I’m not easily impressed by superficial work.”

Photographer Stanley Stellar still hungrily for inspiration. His artistic persistence has enabled him to personify his object of study, his vehicle of expression. His equating his life with a multitude of pictures suits the character bursting from his frame. After all, photographs do not age; the prints and negatives do. The im-

age we see remains present, stays available to us whenever we may encounter it, reprinted or recontextualized, however differently from its debut. An image can move from its aesthetic object, the print, from the negative or digital file that produced it, not only because we may leave the gallery where we find it with a copy in a book or snap a furtive shot with our smart phone, but also — and more provocatively — because it can linger in our minds. Its mental residency reveals itself



(left) Stanley Stellar, *Gerard*, 1981, Vintage Silver Gelatin print, 30 x 20”
(right) Stanley Stellar, *Gerard (Sabbath)*, 1981, Vintage Silver Gelatin print, 30 x 20”

“I follow people down the street. And sometimes it’s beyond me — I’m just not going to let go. I’m going to shoot and shoot and shoot and shoot and shoot and shoot because I know that the worst of them is going to be good and the best of them is gonna be **magic**.”

as a flicker. That image can come over us and leave unexpectedly, electrically.

Photography’s penchant for mobility has only been enhanced by digital technology, which has also removed the possibility of decay. A digital file need not be properly preserved in an archival sleeve or protected from humidity. It can be endlessly copied with no degradation. It need never be printed, either. Its computerized efflorescence can take any shape on whatever screen we want. Its photographic vision of a particular frozen moment can also remain timeless, unaffected by the

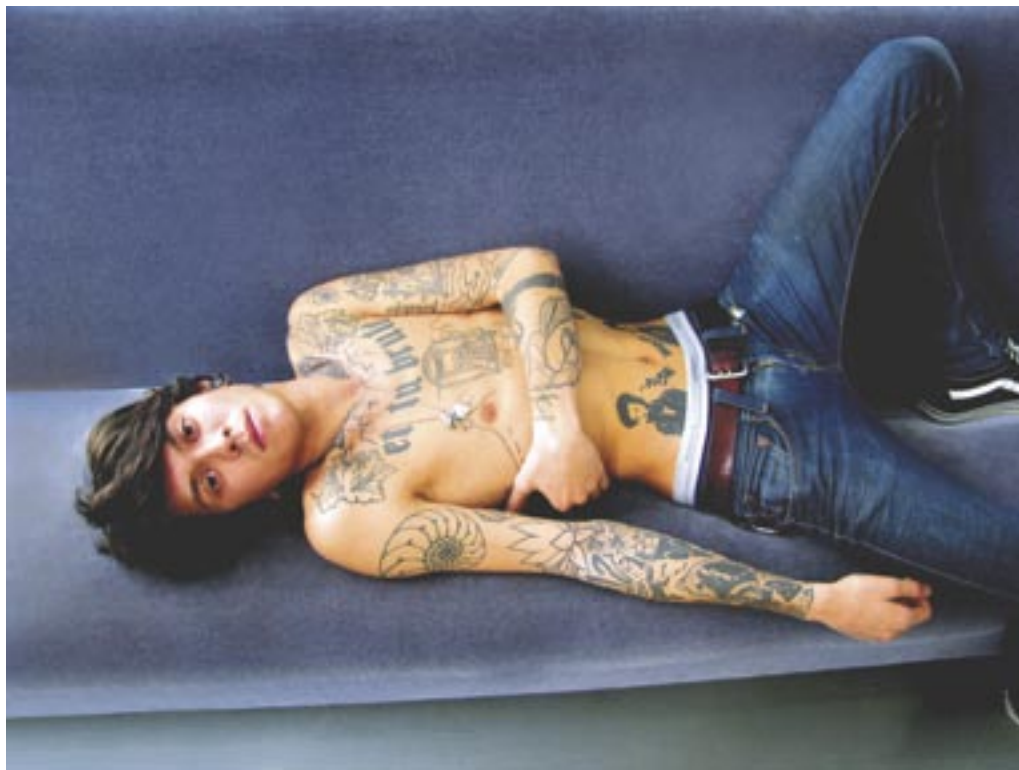
weathering that any physical object necessarily endures. Freed from the physical trace of time, digital photographic files exemplify the insight of our eyes’ peculiarly natural distinction from the rest of our body. As philosopher Jacques Derrida once explained, “one’s act of looking has no age. One’s eyes are the same all of one’s life. ... In other words, if one looks for one’s childhood across all signs of the aging in the body, the deterioration of the musculature, the whitening of the hair, changes in height and weight, one can find one’s childhood in the look of the eyes.”³

That childhood draws me in when Stanley Stellar opens the front door. His eyes are astir, welcoming, curious. He warns me that we have to climb worn stairs; but I assure him that I live in a similar kind of turn-of-last-century building, a tenement to his loft. We talk for hours that seem like minutes over Diet Coke and about our mutual love for photography’s wondrous act of looking. Two weeks later, at the opening reception for *Stanley Stellar: A Photographer*, the reason I am currently at his TriBeCa home to talk about his lifework, curator Peter Weiermair distills that photographic act with the following dynamic to explain the images hanging around us at the Leslie/Lohman Gallery: “Stanley is a looker. The others are the showers.”

Stellar has been showing us something, too. His work stands as a testament to what we as gay men living in New York City have been and can be. He is drawn not to a static image, a thumbnail for gay identity that would imprint us all uniformly, but rather to a personal connection he finds in the beauty of all the men he shoots, not all of which have ever identified as gay. (He has even stopped asking after agreeing when one of his models replied with another question — “Does it really matter?” — the last time he did). Stellar wants to show us the power of recognition: “I remember one day just sitting on the Seventh Avenue Number 1 train, just sitting there in si-



Stanley Stellar, *Unauthorized Folsom Street East*, 2007
Contemporary digital print



(left to right) Stanley Stellar, *I Got Birds, Too*, 1976, Vintage C-print, 16.1 x 22"

Stanley Stellar, *Sean*, 2006, Contemporary digital print, 16 x 21.25"

Stanley Stellar, *The War of the Giants*, Vintage Silver Gelatin print, 13.1 x 13"

Stanley Stellar, *Jonathan*, 1995, Contemporary digital print, 16 x 12"



“Specifically, he wanted to make images he felt that he **didn’t see**: ‘The world didn’t need me as another gay man to do what straight men did, which was photograph women.’ Stellar wanted to make images that reflected a gay sensibility, pictures that would **voice our open contributions** to popular culture.”

lence and looking at everybody sitting opposite of me and recognizing things that were in me in every one of them.” He tells me “that really is the key” to good photography: “I can see parts of me in you. Nobody’s really that different. And, for me, the good photo is when we merge, when that connection is made between what is in you is in me and what is in me is in you. That’s — *that’s* the moment of the photo. *Not*, I’m a fag with a camera; take your pants down.”

His longing to look at disrobed men came from a desire for the kind of intimate freedom he felt denied from having in popular imagery. Desiring to see unhidden masculinity has also always included a larger regard, as well — an ethnographic impulse. For Stellar, looking means bearing witness for the community we now call LGBT: “being a native New Yorker and being here and being out since I was a teenager, I’ve been in this position to see *so much*, so much of who we are and the visual choices we make and the social and sexual and cultural changes. I’ve been watching it since I was a teenager, going, ‘Oh, is that who I am? Or is *that* who I am? Or, is *this* who am? *Just* who I am?’”

Trying on an image for size inspired his first enterprising foray into photography in 1976 with the now iconic *I Got Birds, Too* (1976) (above). He stopped working as an editorial art director because “I realized I didn’t want to keep designing other people’s work. For years, other people’s images, things other people saw and

printed and recorded, *thrilled me*. It was a place I could go into and lose myself in those worlds. [But] when I was saturated enough, I wanted to make my own.” Specifically, he wanted to make images he felt that he didn’t see: “The world didn’t need me as another gay man to do what straight men did, which was photograph women.” Stellar wanted to make images that reflected a gay sensibility, pictures that would voice our open contributions to popular culture.

He had a democratic impulse and decided to make a promotional postcard, “a chest with tattooed birds on it.” The idea had pragmatic elements, as well: “Postcards have always been a medium and here’s a way I can afford to print 3,000 and maybe someone will want to buy one. And it’ll have an image of a male chest that won’t be considered pornographic. A sexy male chest and nipples. I wanted to see if it could be accepted and mailed, if the Post Office wasn’t going to censor it. *Could somebody buy it in a store, put a stamp on it and send it somewhere in the USA?*”

This first image of its kind did more than publicly flash male nipples erotically arranged with lips and a belly button to form a kite-shaped rhombus. It’s floating free through the mail quickly begot “maybe 20,000 gay card shops — people were then doing muscle fags jumping out of birthday cakes. Then everything got cute cute cute cute. Immediately it took all heart and soul out of everything — all truth out of anything — and turned ev-

erything into a gay visual joke.” Pride in visibility erased the quality and context of an image. The seduction of *I Got Birds, Too* lies in part in the model’s impulsive furtive flash to the camera-holding Stellar on a New York City street. Behind him are people going about their usual business. Its economy of looking and showing grounds the image with real-world grit.

Stellar captured similar moments during the ‘80s by documenting public gay male culture on and around the Chelsea Piers and the West Village. Portraits like *Gerard* (1981), *Gerard Sabbath* (1981) (see page 8) and *Rick* (1981) (see back cover) place men outside, within an urban landscape that suggests what happens in these places without the camera present as well as their legible city presence. Those kinds of moment of truth can present themselves at any time, sometimes without the subject consciously responding to the photog telling me about his visual pursuits: “I follow people down the street. And sometimes *it’s beyond me* — I’m just not going to let go. I’m going to shoot and shoot and shoot and shoot and shoot and shoot because I know that the worst of them is going to be good and the best of them is gonna be magic.”

By the ‘90s, after he bought a medium

format Roloflex in 1989, he was taking his photographic encounters indoors, to his studio. At this time, he also soon discovered a new mission for his imagery: “I started realizing that so many of the guys who were coming up here to be photographed weren’t — they were dying. And they were coming here to be photographed because they knew they were dying and they still looked OK. Or, I’d passed these guys in the West Village who were *iconic sexual animals* to me. I’d passed them for years and years and years. There was this guy — young and hot and lean and muscular — and he had these nipples like pinkies, you know? I finally asked him. And he said yes. And he talked to me. And he responded. And he came here. And we became friends. And I took beautiful pictures of him. And then I was invited to his memorial service.” The montage Stellar creates with his short, spaced sentences punctuates his telling me later that he has taken down these pictures from his wall because remembering this time through these connections is too graphic.

“I was recording these beautiful human flowers,” he explains, dropping his voice for the last word. “And I was honoring them — not recording them sick but

recording them delicious and vulnerable and having the same spark as me.” The spark I still see today helps him create the work that he has. Making people comfortable to take a good picture remains crucial. No doubt, Stellar’s calming, playful air helped produce the bold pose that makes *Jonathan* (1995) (above).

One of Stellar’s photography mentors, Peter Hujar, impressed upon him “how important it is to make people feel safe and to photograph people that you have some feeling for and to photograph them with some level of affection, not criticism.” Hujar also taught Stellar how to respect all aspects of photography as an artistic craft: “I remember once I went over to pick up one of his prints [that he was going to give me] and he said, ‘No, no, no, wait. I wanna do something.’ He took a big Sharpie marker and on this big beautiful silver gelatin archival print, he just blacked out a section like in a comic book or something. He scribbled all over this area and just made it disappear. He showed me that *that’s his thing*. *He made that*. He can do whatever he wants to it. And it’s valid.”

Hujar may have espoused the validity of personal artistic expression but Stellar’s later birth did reveal the differences in age between them. After Stellar had produced roughly 25 promotional postcards during the late ‘70s, Hujar told him that he had showed one of the cards to his mother who asked him, “Peter, why don’t you do something like that?” The exchange they had clarified Stellar’s resolve: “[Peter]



“Stellar has been showing us something, too.
His work stands as a **testament** to what
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“So many people over the years have assumed a particular kind of seduction. They say, ‘Oh, you have sex with all your models, all these hot guys.’ No. It’s a different seduction — a level that most people don’t ever experience. It’s not 4:00 a.m. in a gay bar, either. It’s a seduction that’s **ultimately gonna be meaningful** for me and for them.”

looked at me and said, ‘But I don’t want to be known as a gay photographer.’ *He said those words to me.* My reaction was sort of like he was putting me down a little bit. And it was also, *I’m proud to be known as a gay photographer.* I don’t see anything wrong with it. It was a difference of two generations.” Stellar thought that being gay enabled us to break from the usual generational steps forward, from wherever that explicit or implicit guidance comes. “We’re not our parents, either,” he explains. “By being gay men, it puts us in our own unique category.”

Stellar’s survival through the early AIDS crisis has placed him into another: “I resented it for a long time because I was lucky enough to have come of age in the most incredible time on Earth, which I consider the ‘60s, which was the incredible radical freedom change. I remember walking down the street in the 1960s and having my own apartment in Manhattan and thinking how lucky I was to be born into this time. And then, in a little more than ten years, I was walking down the street thinking that I’m born into this time of nightmare. It just happened so fast. It was the best and then it turned into the worst.”

Living like a flesh-and-blood photographic image, still vibrant and present

two decades later with his partner of three decades, has left him hungry for the kind of artistic mentoring he had with Hujar: “Most of the gay men I knew and loved died a long time ago. It hasn’t left me with very many comrades or contemporary examples of how you age as a gay man. Because they didn’t age. They didn’t even last. Where are my guides? I want to see what Peter Hujar would be right now. But I can’t. *I need inspiration, too.* Sometimes I feel like I’m daddy to the world now. I want to be turned on. I don’t want to turn everyone on. I don’t want to always want to make everyone feel safe and secure. I want somebody to do that for me, too. As gay men, that’s something we don’t offer each other very often. I don’t like that.”

Stellar’s honesty hardly rests in exasperation. He reconciles his survival with his verve: “I’m that age. I used to go dancing at Stonewall. Part of me was sort of embarrassed to admit my own antiquity right now; but simultaneously *I’m not*. I’m not. I’m more empowered than ever, than most. So fuck that. I’m still walking up my stairs.” He also takes new pictures every week and never takes lightly the vulnerability that men display in front of his camera: “I’m just as charmed by it as they are by me. Being a photographer,



Stanley Stellar, *Roger*, 1979, Vintage C-print



Stanley Stellar, *12 West*, 1982, Vintage silver gelatin print, 12 x 18"

there’s no secret that it’s a seduction of the model. So many people over the years have assumed a particular kind of seduction. They say, ‘Oh, you have sex with all your models, all these hot guys.’ No. It’s a different seduction — a level that most people don’t ever experience. It’s not 4:00 a.m. in a gay bar, either. It’s a seduction that’s ultimately gonna be meaningful for me and for them.”

So is the show *Stanley Stellar: A Photographer*, which will be up until July 2nd, as well as the book that collects those images, *The Beauty of All Men: Photographs, 1976-2011*. Both give him the rare opportunity to step outside himself, his work. “I don’t really understand myself [like that],” he tells me. “I don’t really understand that I’ve done this over 35 years. It’s more been like my breathing or eating. It’s simply what I do. It’s what I do best and I do it from this place in my heart, not a place of dollars, and not a place of selling the garment.” He understands that today’s focus on fashion photography sometimes has him speaking a “different language” to men he asks to photograph: “They’ll ask me, ‘What’s your idea?’ I say, ‘I don’t need a clever idea. You’re the idea.

What can be deeper than that?”

He does fully embrace photographic technology. On his desk sits his iMac. His ongoing projects include digitizing his body of work: “I love being digital because I feel like I spent *so many hours* standing in my dark room at night, with chemicals in a dark room, trying to keep myself awake. Now I can sit at the computer. Sometimes I’ll sit here at night and I’ll be editing. I’ll play some music and it’ll be 3:00 a.m. I’ll just get up in the middle of this floor by myself and start dancing because *it feels great. I’m not a done deal.*” ■

.....
Seth Clark Silberman is the editor of *The Archive*. His photography will be included in the upcoming group show *Bright Lights, Queer City*, which is organized by the ninth annual Fresh Fruit Festival and will be at the Leslie/Lohman gallery from July 13th to July 23rd.

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¹ Stanley Stellar, interview held at his TriBeCa home, 5 May 2011. All subsequent quotes from him come from this interview.

² See Tim Gray, Stanley Stellar Interview in *The Beauty of All Men: Photographs 1976-2011* (Innsbruck, Austria: All Saints, 2011).

³ Kirby Dick and Amy Ziering Kofman, *Directors. Derrida*, 2002.

Recent Donations & Acquisitions

COMPILED BY WAYNE SNELLEN

This issue, we have a short but stellar list of donations and acquisitions to be added to the collection at the Leslie/Lohman Gay Art Foundation.

Daniel R. Evans donated two paintings, *Homage to Egon Scheile* and *Two Figures*.

Samir Sohby donated 43 small drawings based on the themes of demons and saints.

Emily Singer donated a painting by Mylo Quam, *St. Peter and St. Andrew*, from the show, *Four Visions*.

Stephen Kelemen donated one painting, also from the show *Four Visions*, *Untitled #34*.

Luigi & Luca donated from their exhibition, *The Lovers*, plus 32 photographs from *Private Album*

Charles Leslie purchased from the Luigi & Luca exhibition, *The Emperor, Union* and two photographs from *Private Album*, # 26 and #29.

We thank each of you for your generous support and belief in Leslie/Lohman. ■

Wayne Snellen is the Director of Collections at the Leslie/Lohman Gay Art Foundation



Daniel R. Evans *Homage to Egon Scheile*, 2002, 20 x 16" Acrylic on canvas



(top to bottom)
Luigi & Luca
The Lovers, 2009
17.7 x 11.8"
1/7, digital print

Stephen Kelemen
Untitled #34, 2007-2010,
39 x 39" Acrylic
and pencil on paper

Mylo Quam *St. Peter and St. Andrew*, 1978,
24 x 21" Collage and oil
on Luan board

Learning to Read Mixed Messages for Visual AIDS

BY SETH CLARK SILBERMAN

Intercourse connects our orifices in more ways than one — sometimes indirectly. For example, our ears may hear words overheard or directed our way, but our minds may not assemble them in

quite the same way as the speaker intended. Even the most invested listener or reader will discover that deciphering language can produce a series of mixed messages. So can the tactile kind intercourse, the first kind that may come to mind when that word is at play. For some, erotic desires and fantasies can be difficult to put into words. They can make us too vulnerable. Sometimes, sexual partners who share our beds for years or for the night may have to read our bodies like hieroglyphs to figure out how to proceed.

Mixed messaging proves a provocative gambit for curator John Chiach to address how we live with the HIV/AIDS crisis three decades in for a Visual AIDS show at La Mama La Galleria that will be open until July 3rd.¹ Chiach organized the show in the single-room space to be a cacophony of over 40 text-based works that includes selections by Glenn Ligon, David Wojnarowicz, Yoko Ono and Gran Fury. Without figurative representation, visitors have no representational mirrors, no faces to anchor themselves with and no personal stories to identify with. They are left to navigate the words and their styles of presentation, to situate themselves in relation to each work's message and design — or walk over it, as in the case of Amanda Curreri's *Leveller* (2009/2011) doormat (top left). It represents the intimacy as well as the anonymity that a couple can produce with two facing pronouns, *you* and *me*, that can shift over the course of a conversation depending upon who speaks. By using a doormat, which could be a metaphor for how someone behaves within or treats the other in a couple, Curreri complicates intimate dialogue with the power dynamics that always inform relationships. Or, by placing us looking down upon the words that we can choose to tread over, avoid or spy from across the room, does Curreri suggest that we should be "above" such power plays in

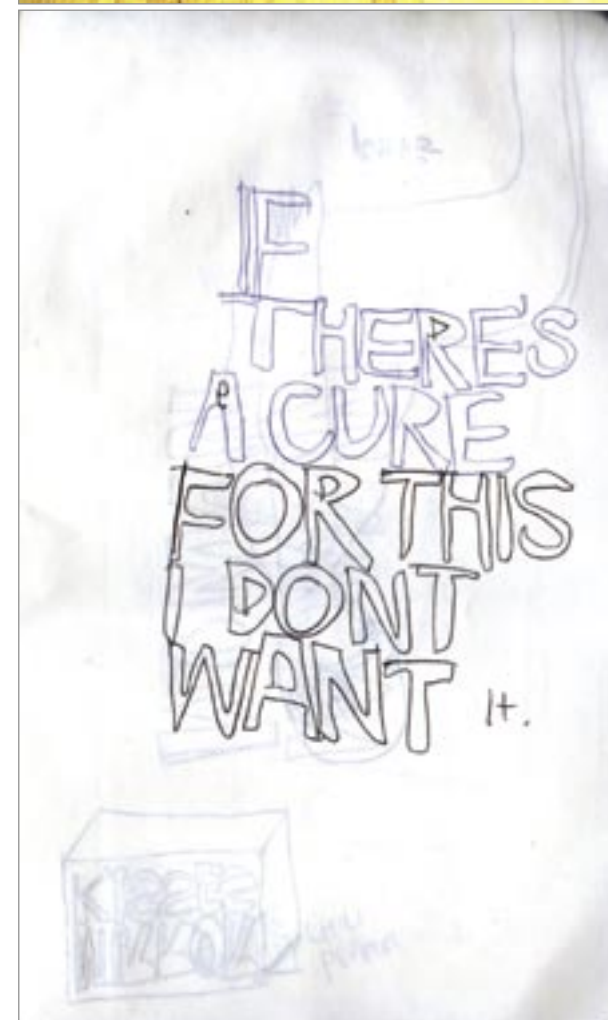
the context of HIV/AIDS?

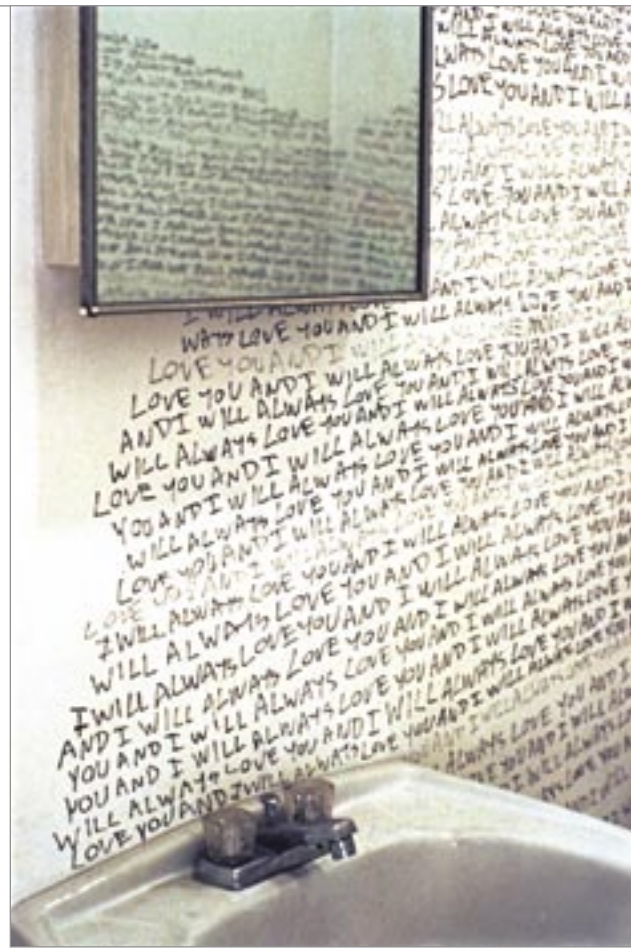
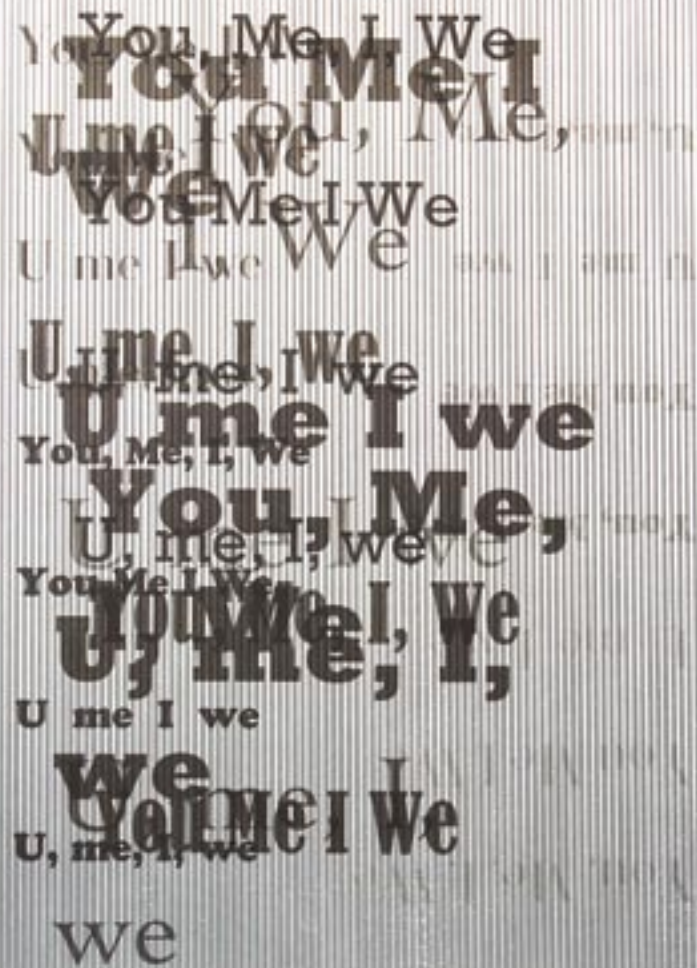
Matt Keegan's silkscreen *You, Me, I, We* (2009) (see page 18) further confuses our subject positions that blurs, interchanges, inverts and fades the pronouns we can inhabit over lines that seem to be a page in a book. How does it connect with the rest? How do we connect with HIV/AIDS awareness and activism 30 years to the month after the Center for Disease Control and Prevention Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report (MMWR) published a report of five cases of *Pneumocystis carinii pneumonia* among previously healthy young "homosexual" men in Los Angeles?² With recent drug regimens and support systems for the well insured that make living with HIV/AIDS and perhaps dying by some unrelated cause more plausible, does the lack of a perceived panic reduce HIV/AIDS pillow talk to a mumble? The New York City Department of Health seems to think so with its new subway ad campaign series that warns, "It's never just HIV," alongside sometimes-graphic imagery and a list of other health issues that can more easily manifest in an HIV+ body.

Other work in the *Mixed Messages* show looks to popular culture to articulate our new relationship with HIV/AIDS, including Nolan Hendrickson's *Love Hangover* (2010) (bottom right). The drawing riffs on the "If there's a cure for this, I don't want it" line from the Diana Ross disco anthem with hand-drawn lettering in black and blue ink. The bruising that those colors can connote mingles with the erotic reverie of the line when Ross coos it over, both the slow, slinky groove that introduces the "sweetest hangover" that she does not want to "get over" as well over the hypnotic hi-hat-

(above right) Amanda Curreri, *Leveller*, 2009/2011, enamel on floor mat, 48 x 36". Courtesy of the Artist and Romer Young Gallery, SF.

Nolan Hendrickson, *Love Hangover*, 2010, ink on paper, 8 x 5". Courtesy of the Artist.





Matt Keegan, *You, Me, I, We*, 2007, silkscreen, 30 x 25". Edition of 10 (MAK-3-PRT). Courtesy of the Artist and D'Amelio Terras, NY.

Larry Krone, *And I Will Always Love You (In Reach)*, 1996/2011, permanent marker on wall, dimensions variable. Courtesy of the Artist.

FILM

Young and Gay Under the Eyes of the Others

The American debut of a series of French gay shorts at the Leslie/Lohman Gallery BY ILANA ELOIT



(above) Stills from *Omar*

On June 14th, the Leslie/Lohman Gallery spends the night in "Gay Paris" by welcoming the American film debut of five French shorts dealing with homosexuality. Commissioned in 2009 by the French government, these five films are part of a series called *Jeune et homo sous le regard des autres*, or "Young and gay under the eyes of others." The films were developed from scripts that won a competition with over a thousand in the running. They are directed by some of the most cutting-edge contemporary French filmmakers such as Rodolphe Marconi and Céline Sciamma. Each of the shorts reflects contemporary issues facing the LGBT community in France, including gay teenagers discovering their first sexual desires, the life-changing experience of someone's first gay kiss and the experience of coming out.

How is it to be young and gay in France? What are the obstacles inhibiting young women and men from accepting their homosexuality? How do they deal with their desires, how do they take pride in themselves *sous le regard des autres*, or under the eyes of others? Some of the shorts deal with the trauma that LGBT teenagers must endure when at that sometimes-fragile age between a sheltered childhood and an independent young adulthood. One takes a decidedly comic approach to expose how homophobia

can persist in seemingly innocent presumptions. All, like sparks of hope, offer happy endings.

- *Omar* (2010), directed by Sébastien Gabriel, features two kids, Omar and Arthur, living in a French suburban ghetto. In order to express their hidden relationship, they write slam poetry and share it when Omar can ditch his basketball friends to meet Arthur in an underground garage. Omar's friends think he is going to see a girl. The movie delicately deals with the unbearable pressure that social and cultural backgrounds can still add to open gay expression in France. Omar is black and his sports buddies are Arab; Arthur is white.
- *Basket et Maths* (Basketball and Mathematics) (2009), directed by Rodolphe Marconi, deals with two

"How is it to be young and gay in France? What are the **obstacles** inhibiting young women and men from accepting their homosexuality? How do they deal with their **desires**, how do they take pride in themselves *sous le regard des autres*, or under the eyes of others?"



Still from *Basket et Maths*

driven pulse of the rest of the track. Just like Diana's voice soars over, purrs with and sinks into the beat, Hendrickson toys with what the "it" could be, by making it almost an afterthought, to the side, and not outlined like every other word. The paper on which he draws is also a palimpsest. Faded or erased words and lines give a present yet not quite legible context whatever cure and desire we want to read into the words.

Larry Krone's installation *And I Will Always Love You (In Reach)* (2006/2011) (above, right) re-contextualizes the words of another diva — either Whitney Houston or Dolly Parton, depending upon your primary affection for either or for their different musical genres — to consider how passion can engender mixed messages all on its own. Its obsessive "and I will always love you" chant, hand-written with permanent marker on what looks like an apartment or a home's bathroom wall, suggests both the unchecked devo-

tion of the absent scribe and his disconnection from his object of affection. The mirror reveals just how much of the walls he has covered. Krone's confessional illustrates how loneliness can also inform otherwise sweet words of devotion. From the vantage point of an unrequited, fizzled or even fantasized love affair, Krone's piece offers a deeply personal reading of the following HIV/AIDS message that curator John Chlach heard from a staff psychologist in Cleveland, Ohio, in the mid '90's that has stayed with him ever since: "AIDS is a crisis of connections."

Felix Gonzalez-Torres views that crisis with an eye to LGBT civil rights history with *Untitled* (1989), an almost entirely black silkscreen on paper that lists seven historical events or people along with significant dates centered at the bottom. Either isolating and inclusive — the monochromatic black could suggest emptiness or, following subtractive color theory, the equal mixing of all three primary colors

— *Untitled* frames our understanding of its open space with its seven historical listings, not in chronological order. Not even a title for Gonzalez-Torres' piece can direct us. We are expected to use our eyes and our minds to make the connections we need, and abate any crisis, it seems. ■

Mixed Messages will be on display at La MaMa La Galleria at 6 E. 1st Street (between Bowery and 2nd Avenue) on Thursdays through Sundays from June 2 - July 3, 2011. For more information, find the *Mixed Messages* catalogue at http://www.thebody.com/visualaids/current/pdfs/mixed_messages_catalog.pdf.

¹ Visual AIDS is a contemporary arts organization fully committed to AIDS awareness and HIV prevention that both provides assistance for artists living with HIV/AIDS and presents HIV/AIDS-related visual arts projects. For more information, please visit their website at <http://http://www.thebody.com/visualaids>.

² "Pneumocystis pneumonia — Los Angeles," *MMWR* 30 (1981): 250.



Still from *Les Incroyables Aventures de Fusion Man*

teammates whose feelings for each other are unclear and frightening.

• **Les Incroyables Aventures de Fusion Man** (The Incredible Adventures of Fusion Man) (2009), directed by Xavier Gens and Marius Vale, presents a remarkably tongue-in-cheek and gay rendition of a Batman-like urban superhero. By doing so, this short highlights the homoeroticism already present in recent films and graphic novels that re-imagine the adventures and origins of the classic superheroes first



Still from *Pauline*

created over 70 years ago. The short's script comes from 23-year-old film student David Halphen, who follows an approach that other gay artists have taken to reveal homosexuality at the center of popular culture. Another example, a collage by Ross Johnston entitled *Secret Identities* (2001) that depicts Superman kissing Robin and Batman staring at them, was included in The Leslie/Lohman Gallery's 20th anniversary show. In *Les Incroyables Aventures*, Fusion Man's devotion for his boyfriend watching him save the day on his television at home offers a harsh satire of the patriarchal, heteronormative stereotype that the male superhero, typically upholds. By exposing and not fulfilling that expectation, the short illustrates what José Esteban Muñoz calls "disidentification," a process "meant to be descriptive of the survival strategies the minority subject practices in order to negotiate a phobic majoritarian public sphere that continuously elides or punishes the existence of subjects who do not conform to the phantasm of normative citizenship."¹ By doing so comically, the film disempowers widespread homophobic clichés.

• **En Colo** (Summer Camp) (2010), directed by Pascal-Alex Vincent, considers the difficulty of experiencing new gay feelings in a playful, teen environment. How is it possible to face the seriousness

of gay love at the age of a so-called innocence? *En Colo* shows us how during a game of "truth or dare."

• **Pauline** (2010), directed by Céline Sciamma, offers the only short dealing with lesbian love. It showcases the complexity of the realization of a young girl's lesbian feelings, the confrontation of male stereotypes as far as lesbianism is concerned and highlights the potentially dramatic consequences of the coming out.

Intensely diverse, these five shorts depict complex stories in archetypal social situations. In the end, these stories are so realistic and touching at the same time that anyone could identify with the young characters. Whether gay or not, accepting difference is a universal theme. At some point in our lives, we all have to negotiate our identities and our individual differences among the larger culture. After all, who can say without reservation, "I am normal"? ■

Ilana Eloit is an intern from France at the Leslie/Lohman Gay Art Foundation. She is getting an M.A. in Public Affairs from Sciences Po Paris as well as an M.A. in Art History from the Sorbonne. She wrote the subtitles for these five shorts.

¹ José Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1999), 4.

EMERGING ARTIST PROFILE

Craig Seymour

Craig Seymour boasts *bons mots* from the press like "academic-turned-whore" and "the dick-dancing scholar" in a box that scrolls near the top of his website, <http://www.craigseymour.com>. He brandishes the anxiety that some have with a tenured professor and distinguished music critic unabashedly presenting gay male sexual culture, either visually or lexically, because his work boldly pursues the

graduate school experiences, *All I Could Bare: My Life in the Strip Clubs of Gay Washington, D.C.* (Atria, 2008), which *New York Times* bestseller Josh Kilmington-Purcell calls a "captivating introspective" that is not only "part sexy parable, part witty reminiscence, part informative history lesson" but also proof that "there's far more to being naked than taking off one's clothes."

That attuned sense of personal, social

"As much as he likes to photograph the action and desires at play, Seymour is **hardly** an idle voyeur."

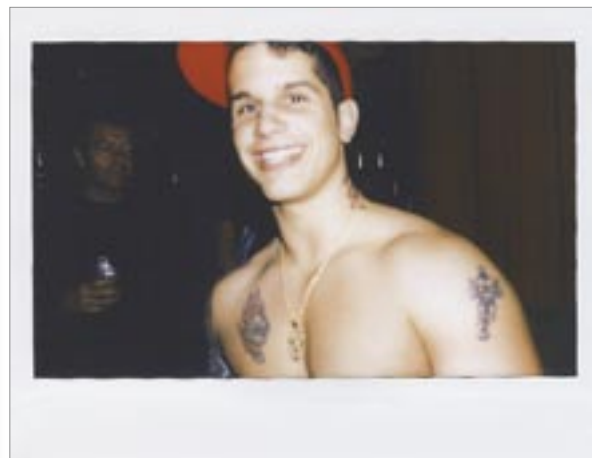
economy of male bodies in public and semi-public spaces where gay men and others congregate. As much as he likes to photograph the action and desires at play, Seymour is hardly an idle voyeur. His turn to photography continues the work of his memoir about some of his

and historic space informs his images of erotic freedoms, even the kinds that mainstream LGBTQ communities striving for marriage equality or other means of social homogenization may not want to claim. Like Stanley Stellar, Seymour looks for himself within the frames he

shoots and enables us to connect with our own or others' lived fantasies. Seymour gives us images to illustrate how to foster our sexual connections and communities. (See page 2 for the architectural symmetry between *Seymour's Secret's, Washington D.C. and Stellar's Bare Bro in Brooklyn*). Seymour has pursued this new direction in his career independently, gutsily. He self-published his collection *American Boys: a strip club diary* (Blurb, 2009) and sent copies to curators and editors. It was soon called one of the "best of '09" photo books by and featured on Out.com. His enterprising self-marketing led his photography to be shown both in Chicago and New York and to be included in *The Washington Post*, *\$pread*, *Next* and *The Guide*. His work has caught the eye of international photography blogs and was including recently in Brazil's largest gay magazine, *Junior*. Still at the beginning of his artistic career, he has already received informal kudos from filmmaker, author and



Craig Seymour, Chris Porter and Alessio Romero, *Hustlaball NYC*, 2010, digital file



(far left) Craig Seymour, Jason Pitt, Folsom St. Fair, San Francisco, 2010, digital file

(left) Craig Seymour, Pierre Fitch, Hustlaball NYC, 2010, digital file

(opposite top) Craig Seymour, Adam Killian and Ralph Woods, Hustlaball NYC, 2010, digital file

(opposite bottom) Craig Seymour, Folsom St. Fair, San Francisco, CA, 2010, digital file

provocateur John Waters. Months after sending *American Boys* as well as the newest collection *Shower* (Blurb, 2010), Seymour received the following postcard of thanks: “Dear Craig, Thank you for your lovely smut collection! John Waters.”

What inspired you to turn to photography to continue pursuing your interests in gay male sexual cultures?

It was an organic transition. When I started doing photography, I thought it made sense to take pictures of the things that most interested me, and those things involved aspects of gay sexual culture.

What new role does photography play in gay sexual spaces now that smart phones and pocketable digital cameras are so prevalent?

I think people are taking pictures in these spaces in the same way that people have always taken snapshots. They serve as souvenirs of the experience. The difference is that, because cameras are so pervasive now, they’ve become more permissible in some sexual spaces. On the other hand, many nightclubs, bathhouses, and strip clubs are much more explicit about prohibiting photography.

How does having your cameras with you in these spaces make people react to you? How does that dynamic affect the photographs you take?

It depends on the context of where I’m shooting and why. Often times, I try to arrange with a club to shoot. In that case, everything is upfront. I do what I have to

do, and, at a certain point, I think people forget I’m there. (I also try to avoid using flash, which makes me less conspicuous.) The other time I most frequently take pictures is when a lot of other people are taking pictures with their cell phones and pocket cameras. In this case, I just blend in with all of the other picture takers.

What photographers inspire your work?

Stylistically, I think this body of work is most influenced by three photographers: Larry Fink, Daido Moriyama, and Constantine Manos. Fink, for the way he reveals character and relationships through framing, light and shadow. Moriyama, for his grittiness, and Manos, whom

Why is it important to photograph these spaces? What kind of aesthetic and social record do you want to leave?

I think it’s important to photograph these spaces because they are a part of our culture. It just so happens that it’s a part that a lot of people want to overlook, because sex — especially gay sexual expression — makes them uncomfortable. But I think that documenting sex is important. Sex speaks to how we live as much as what we eat, what we wear, where we live. In fact, it fuels many of those things.

There’s a tendency among some gay people to want to distance themselves from public expressions of sexuality. They think these expressions play into

“A good photo for me is one that says something about the way we live, how we experience life, our hard truths, desires and aspirations, our dramas and joys.”

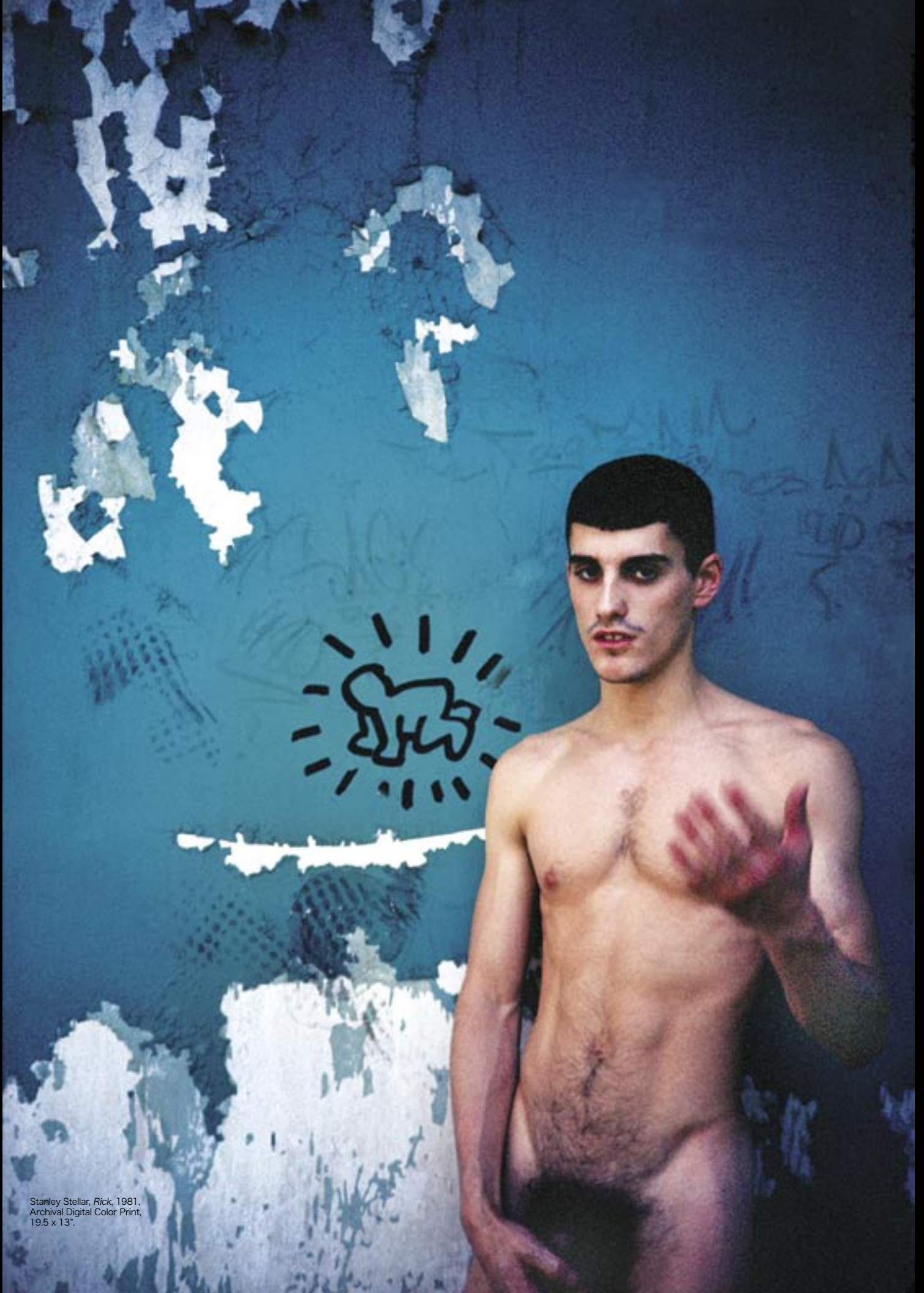
photographer Platon turned me on to during a portfolio review, for the way his framing and his use of color can make an everyday moment seem iconic.

What makes a good photograph for you? How do you select the images you use from those you take?

A good photo for me is one that says something about the way we live, how we experience life, our hard truths, desires and aspirations, our dramas and joys. I’m looking for all of that in a picture.

stereotypes of gay people as predatory and promiscuous. But the truth is that public sex is increasingly a part of our culture as a whole. You can see this on college campuses all the time. I don’t think a drunken, heterosexual orgy at a frat house is any different from a bunch of gay men throwing a sex party or hooking up in the back room of a leather bar. I don’t think we, as gay people, should be ashamed of our public sexual expressions. In fact, I don’t think we will be truly liberated until we can embrace them. ■





Stanley Stellar, *Rick*, 1981.
Archival Digital Color Print,
19.5 x 13".